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-House Majority Leader John Boehner (R-OH)

House GOP says: Put security first

By John Boehner

Immigration reform and border security are front and center in the political arena for a very good reason. The American people recognize the challenges presented by these issues, and they are demanding reforms that secure our nation's borders and enforce our laws.

House Republicans want to end the flood of illegal immigrants that endangers our national security and jeopardizes our efforts to make America safe in a post-9/11 world. We recently announced five principles to guide our efforts as we work with the Senate on legislation that secures our borders and puts a premium on strict enforcement of our laws:

Provide additional resources to federal and state authorities to strengthen border patrol efforts.

Stiffen penalties for those who break our immigration laws.

Enforce the laws against employers who knowingly hire illegal immigrants.

Oppose efforts to reward the behavior of those who have chosen to break our laws.

Insist that newcomers obey the law, assimilate into American society by learning English, and embrace our common identity as Americans.

Our announcement sent many observers inside Washington into a state of overanalysis. Some predicted that reform was dead, but the opposite has occurred. Our goal of sending a strong border security bill to President Bush is gaining momentum.

Our principles are reflected in the bill passed by the House last December, and they stand in stark contrast to the Democrat bill pushed through the Senate by Minority Leader Harry Reid (D., Nev.) and Sen. Ted Kennedy (D., Mass.), a bill a majority of Senate Republicans opposed. In fact, the Reid-Kennedy bill endorses troubling policies that encourage open borders and welcome more illegal immigrants - in addition to the 10 million to 12 million already here. Here are a few examples:

Local law enforcement could detain illegal immigrants only on criminal violations of immigration law, not for civil offenses. It's important to remember that up until the morning of Sept. 11, the terrorists had only committed civil violations of the immigration laws. This type of loophole for terrorists cannot be tolerated.

Illegal immigrants would be allowed to receive in-state tuition at a local college or university, while an American from a neighboring state would be charged out-of-state tuition.

Illegal immigrants would receive Social Security benefits for the time they worked in the United States illegally.

The United States would be forced to consult with Mexico on the construction of any border fence or barrier.

The expansion of "prevailing wage rights" would force small businesses to pay illegal immigrants more than American workers for the same job.

These and other issues raise serious concerns about the Senate approach, and they are being examined in hearings held by House committees across the country. We believe these hearings will strengthen our ability to craft strong border security legislation. In fact, since we announced our hearings, both Democrat and Republican senators have begun to embrace the security-first approach.

The American people are serious about making our borders secure and shutting down the flow of illegal immigration into our cities and states. And Republicans

want to send a strong border security bill to President Bush. Congress has compromised on this issue for too long.

House Republicans understand that we need to work with all parties to complete work on a responsible bill, but we will stand firm behind our principles to ensure that our finished product will make a difference in securing our borders and effectively enforcing our immigration laws.

U.S. Rep. John Boehner (R., Ohio) (talktothemajorityleader@mail.house.gov) is the U.S. House majority leader.